

Copter Jailbreak Mastermind Talks

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Caracas

A Venezuelan who says he was the "brains" behind the first recorded prison break by helicopter told a news conference yesterday it cost \$1 million to arrange.

Counterfeiter Carlos Contreras Castro, who soared to freedom over the walls of a Mexico City prison in August with Joel D. Kaplan, a convicted American murderer who has been described as a CIA agent, surfaced in Caracas Saturday. He said he returned to Venezuela three weeks ago.

"The escape was organized from outside Mexico," Contreras told newsmen in the luxuri-

See Back Page

ous Caracas Hilton Hotel. "It cost a million dollars and I was the brains behind it and the one who carried it out."

DETENTION

Contreras said he was detained by the Venezuelan police from October 7, when he re-entered the country, until Saturday. He said there are no charges pending against him in Venezuela and that Mexico is not trying to extradite him.

"I was being protected by the Venezuelan state against possible attacks from a country whose leaders will never pardon me for having made a fool of them," he said.

Contreras said the helicopter which lifted him and Kaplan from an exercise yard in the Santa Marta Acatitla Prison August 18 hovered just above the ground for eight seconds while the two men clamored on board.

Prison guards, assuming the helicopter contained government officials, stood looking on.

ALTITUDE

The helicopter sped away at 400 feet to avoid detection by airport radar screens. Contreras said the escape plan called for a helicopter to spend no more than 15 seconds within the prison.

He said they flew for 15 minutes to a field illuminated by car headlights and then switched to a small airplane which took them to Tamaulipas state near the United

States border.

Contreras said Kaplan entered the U.S. while he was in another plane to Guatemala and returned to Venezuela via Panama. He said all pilots involved in the escape were Americans.

SENTENCE

Contreras had been serving a five-year sentence for counterfeiting Mexican passports. He said he had only 1 1/2 months remaining in his sentence when "they offered me a lot of money" to get Kaplan out.

He declined to say who paid him or tell how the helicopter and planes were obtained.

"My companion (Kaplan) had already spent \$200,000 on two abortive escape attempts," he said. "One day we were in the exercise yard playing basketball when I looked up and saw a helicopter. The idea for the escape came to me in that instant."

The Venezuelan said Kaplan, nephew of a U. S. millionaire, did not murder Mexican Melcho Vidal, a crime for which he was sentenced to 28 years in prison. He said Vidal is still alive.